

Rural Tourism Marketing

Chapter Five – We Need a Plan!

As we've undertaken some of the exercises and research efforts on the previous pages, you've probably begun to think of your community or region as a "tourism product." Now, it is time to create a plan to market your product.

The marketing plan is a document that lays out a program to sell your area as a tourist destination to a targeted public, sets measurable milestones in achieving your goals, works within a realistic budget and keeps you on track until your goals are achieved. Creating the plan doesn't have to be a grueling exercise; in fact, it can be fun. Remember that tourism is supposed to be a fun industry!

It is important that your development of a marketing plan be an *inclusive*, rather than an *exclusive* process. This means that you'll need to create a marketing plan committee from your board, your community members and your civic leaders. That doesn't mean that they actually *write* the plan, as committees are generally better for reviewing and providing input than they are for creating. But it does mean that you'll need their "stamp of approval" as you and a focused team of "volunteer experts" from the larger committee actually create the plan.

This creative team can be experts from your own staff, from your local lodging or tourist industry, or from the local advertising and marketing sectors. An ideal creative team might be yourself, one or two people from the local lodging or restaurant industry who are familiar with marketing and advertising their own businesses, and an advertising agency professional from the local community. Be prepared to do the actual writing yourself, with their input and review.

It might seem easier to simply write the plan entirely by yourself, but please remember that this is a community project. And when it comes time to fund the budget, whether that money comes from a city or county government or other source, you'll need as many supporters as possible. That happens when they feel "ownership" of the marketing plan.



Remember too that a marketing plan is a document that can and should constantly be updated. It is an evolving process, where programs that work are expanded and programs that don't work are discarded. Although most marketing plans are labeled by year, usually following the budgeting process, it is not necessary to start every year from "ground zero."

Product + Marketing = Sales

Sales are a result of having a product to sell and the marketing effort that is undertaken. The finest product in the world will not find a buyer if there is no one to tell the buyers of its existence. Conversely, the most sophisticated marketing effort in the world will have little effect in convincing buyers to purchase an inferior product. Especially a second time!

And so it is with tourism marketing. You might have a beautiful area, rich in recreational and cultural resources with no discernible tourist trade. That is probably because no one knows what you have to offer. Either you are "off the beaten path" and most tourists don't know you are there, or you are dealing with an outdated and inferior public perception of your community or area that you would like to change.

The marketing plan is your roadmap to sales success.

A Step-by-Step Guide to Marketing Plan Development

A marketing plan format is suggested on the following pages. You don't have to follow it exactly, but you might find it helpful to use it for your first effort.

First you'll find a section-by-section outline of a marketing plan that has worked for other destination marketing organizations, with complete explanations of what each section contains and why.

Then, you'll find blank forms that will help you create your own plan using this format. Remember that you can change things that you feel don't fit your own objectives, since no two communities or destinations are alike.

Helpful Hint: *If you have established an official tourism promotion organization such as a Convention & Visitors Bureau or a tourism committee of a Chamber of Commerce, you might consider membership in the Western Association of Convention & Visitors Bureaus (WACVB). Once a member, you can take advantage of their resource library, which contains a collection of Marketing Plans created by such organizations throughout the west!*

